



CONTACTS

PLEASE EMAIL THE
RELEVANT DEPARTMENT

helpfile@computershopper.co.uk
for all PC problems

officehelp@computershopper.co.uk
for help with office applications

YOU CAN ALSO WRITE TO US AT:

Help
Computer Shopper
30 Cleveland Street
London
W1T 4JD

HELPFILE

Slow file copying between internal and external hard disks

Q My computer has an Asrock 4CoreDual-SATA2 motherboard and one internal SATA II hard disk. I transfer data between this and an external IDE hard disk over a USB2 connection. The transfer rate from computer to external drive seems to be just over 9MB/s, and about 11MB/s in the other direction.

I was wondering if there is a faster way. Two arrangements come to mind. The first is to remove the external IDE disk from its container and put it in an IDE caddy so that I can remove it from the computer as required. Perhaps doing away with the USB2 connection would be beneficial. Otherwise, I could use a second SATA II drive in a SATA II caddy instead of the IDE drive. Perhaps two SATA II drives would communicate more rapidly?

JE Jones, cyfrifydd@cyfrifydd.plus.com

A The data transfer rates you report do seem slow, but not unduly slow for an external USB drive. A USB2 port has a maximum theoretical data transfer rate of 480Mbit/s, but in practice you won't get more than about 40MB/s when reading and 28MB/s when writing, even with the fastest USB hard disk. Note that there is a difference between megabits (Mbit) and megabytes (MB). Flash drives tend to be slower still, because of the lower speed of flash memory.

On the other hand, your data transfer rates are definitely much faster than the maximum for a USB1.1 device, which would be little more than 1MB/s. USB does have a number of design issues that make it unsuitable for intensive data transfers. In many cases USB transfers use an excessive amount of CPU time, and this may be limiting the maximum speed possible.

There could also be problems with your hardware or the USB drivers. Nvidia chipsets are notorious for causing problems with USB and, while your VIA chipset is better than Nvidia's in this respect, its USB

performance is not as good as that of Intel chipsets. I would recommend updating the drivers for your VIA chipset to see if that improves performance.

You also didn't mention how you are copying the files, or which operating system you use. Many Vista users have been complaining about slow file-copying operations, particularly across a network but also to external drives. The recently released Service Pack 1 has helped to some extent. In both Vista and XP, copying files using the Xcopy command from a command prompt window will always be much faster than copying files using Explorer.

If you really want to speed up the process, you should get rid of the USB interface and put your IDE drive in a removable caddy. You could also get an external SATA (eSATA) drive. eSATA drives plug into the controller directly, allowing them to operate as fast as an internal SATA drive. In practice, data transfer speed is limited mainly by the drive's sustainable data transfer rate and not the interface. As your motherboard doesn't have an eSATA port, you will need to fit an eSATA backplate, which costs around £4.

If you choose a caddy system, bear in mind that PATA drives (unlike SATA) were not designed to be hot-swappable. You have to turn the computer off before you can remove or replace the drive.



▲ An eSATA disk provides much faster data transfers than one that uses a USB interface

Feedback: Memory upgrade

✉ I have some further information for you regarding memory upgrades on the Asus A7A266 motherboard. Following your helpful information (*Helpfile, Shopper 244*), I initially purchased a 1GB module and used it to replace one of the existing 256MB modules. The computer accepted it, together with the original 256MB module in the second slot. I then purchased a further 1GB module and replaced the second 256MB module with it. The computer failed to boot.

I exchanged the 1GB modules to find out if the latest purchase was faulty, but it wasn't. Since then I have managed to find references on the Asus forum relating to memory upgrades for this motherboard. Nobody there seems to have succeeded in achieving the maximum upgrade of 2GB, even though the

Asus manual suggests that it's possible. The maximum upgrade noted by users has been 1.5GB. Any more than that, and the PC fails to boot.

One of the contributors' entries stated: "Asus support reported that the A7A266 could not support 2GB of memory. Rev.1.03 can only handle 1.5GB because of a chipset problem."

Eric Atkinson, atkineric@btinternet.com

A For some reason, Crucial's database, which is usually pretty accurate, still lists this motherboard as capable of accepting 2GB of DDR RAM. Since you purchased both sticks from Crucial, which guarantees compatibility, you may want to alert its technical support staff to this problem.

Backup fails on large flash drive

Q Windows XP's backup facility is giving me problems. It asks me if I would like to back up my whole PC, which I do. It then does its thing and finds 50,000 files – which add up to 11.5GB. However, I don't have much data on my PC.

It then asks me where I want to store the backup and I tell it to use drive E:, which is a 16GB Corsair flash drive. It informs me that it can't transfer the data as the drive is full. Why is it not possible to put 11.5GB of data on a 16GB flash drive?

Rod Seed, rodseed@telkomsa.net

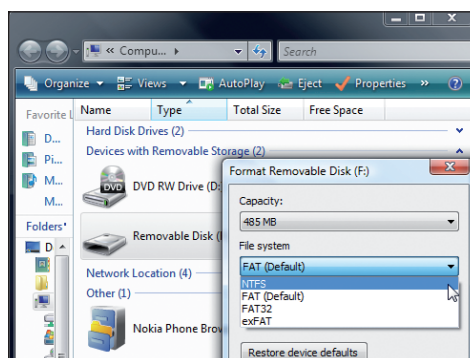
A There are a couple of possible problems. First, Windows Backup (NTBackup) creates a temporary copy of the backup before writing it to the final destination media. This temporary file is usually created in the same folder that stores ntbakup.exe. On some systems there may not be enough free space on the System drive for the temporary file.

The second issue is caused by the size of the flash drive itself. If you were trying to write to smaller media, such as recordable CDs, a good backup program would split the backup file into pieces small enough to fit on CDs. However, your drive is big enough for the entire backup to fit on to one drive.

There is just one issue: the writers of NTBackup hadn't anticipated problems with the maximum size of a file. Most flash drives, and other external USB drives,

use the old FAT32 file system because it is fully compatible with Mac computers and older versions of Windows. Unfortunately, FAT32 has a maximum file size of only 4GB (or, to be exact, 4GB minus 1 byte). NTBackup doesn't check for this limit and won't break the backup file into several files to avoid problems. Your backup will always fail when it gets to the 4GB point.

The solution is to reformat the flash drive using the NTFS file system instead of FAT32. Then the maximum file size will be two to the power 32 - 1 clusters, or up to almost 16TB (terabytes).



▲ The FAT32 file system that most flash drives use has a maximum file size of 4GB, so using NTFS is preferable

Unable to log on

Q I followed some instructions from an article in *Computer Buyer* about how to log on to Windows XP automatically. Now when I restart the computer I am unable to log on. I get a logon box and I have not forgotten the password, but it won't let me in.

My operating system is a legal copy of Windows XP Professional, with add-ons gleaned from *Computer Buyer* and *Computer Shopper*. I have been getting both magazines for some years now.

Could I install Windows 98 Second Edition on a spare partition, use that to gain access to Windows XP and correct or reset the password, or at least get to my files?

I have a slave hard disk on the PC, too. Would it be better to make the slave the master, run the Windows 98 installation on that disk and then access the XP drive?

Of course, it could be that I can't see the wood for the trees and there is another, easier way.

Ken McGarrity, m010b0749@blueyonder.co.uk

A You must have put in the wrong password. I can't comment about other magazines' suggestions, but if your computer has more than one user account, or if the only user account has a password, the only way to log on automatically is to use the old Windows 2000-style username and passwords Control Panel option. This doesn't appear in the Windows XP Control Panel, but you can still access it by clicking on Start, Run and typing the command: control userpasswords2.

When you enter this you will see an option labelled 'Users must enter a username and password to use this computer', which is checked by default. Uncheck this and, when you click OK, you will be asked to enter a

username and password. Provided you enter a valid username and password combination (it does not check these when you enter them), that user will be logged on automatically on the next reboot.

If the password is incorrect you will still get the usual Welcome screen, asking you to select a user, or else (if you selected the option not to use the Welcome screen) a logon box. You can then enter any valid username and password.

If this doesn't work, check that your Caps Lock key is not on, as passwords are case-sensitive. Then try restarting in Safe Mode by pressing F8 during the boot process before the first Windows screen appears. All copies of Windows XP have an Administrator account, which is visible only in Safe Mode. Windows XP Home does not have a password on this account but XP Professional does. This will have been set when Windows was first installed.

If your computer came with Windows XP Professional pre-installed you may be able to ask the maker what the default Administrator password is. If you can log on with any administrator account, you will be able to reset forgotten passwords.

Loading a copy of Windows 98 on the second partition probably won't help, as Windows 98 doesn't understand the NTFS file format that Windows XP generally uses. If you can't find a password that works, you will have to resort to a password-removal utility. There are several of these around, each of which relies on booting from a Linux CD and running a program that reads the master passwords file and rewrites any that you wish to change. To avoid potential problems, it's usually better to remove the password, log in and use Windows to set a new one.

Try the Offline NT Password & Registry Editor from <http://home.eunet.no/pnordahl/ntpasswd>.

Your experts

HELPFILE

160

Paul Mullen

With 27 years of PC experience as a power user, programmer and IT consultant, Paul Mullen answers all PC problems, tackling hardware, system and security issues.



helpfile@computershopper.co.uk

OFFICE HELP

166

Kay Ewbank

Database developer and productivity expert Kay Ewbank offers help with office applications.



officehelp@computershopper.co.uk

CONTACTS

Please contact the relevant department at the email address listed above. You can also write to us at:

Help
Computer Shopper
30 Cleveland Street
London
W1T 4JD

Please try to give full details of your problem. We need an email address or daytime and evening telephone numbers in case we need more information.

Although the policy of *Computer Shopper* is not to publish readers' email addresses, we include them in Help so that other readers with experience of similar problems can share their solution (please also cc any comments to the relevant Help department above). If you would prefer not to have your email address published, please say so. ☺

Windows thinks my USB2 ports are only USB1.1

Q I have a problem when trying to use a Digital TV USB stick with my PC, a 2.8GHz Celeron D Windows XP Home desktop with 1.5GB of RAM. The TV stick worked well until recently.

It requires USB2, which my PC has. When I first installed it I had no problems, but now it exhibits the same symptoms as when I tried to use it with an earlier IBM laptop that had only USB1.1. This cleared up when I added an outboard PCMCIA card, converting it to USB2.

I have replaced the TV stick with a new one and reinstalled the software, but the problem is still there. When I try to plug in any USB2 item, a message appears saying, "This USB device can perform faster if you connect it to a Hi-Speed USB 2.0 port".

Is it possible that the computer has regressed to USB1.1? If so, how do I fix it?

Terry Bramer, bramer.t@tiscali.co.uk

A The message "This USB device can perform faster if you connect it to a Hi-Speed USB 2.0 port" is supposed to appear if your PC does not support USB2, or where some ports operate only at the lower speed. Often, front panel ports may not work at full speed. If you have plugged the device into a port that is supposed to be USB2-compatible, there are a couple of things that may have happened to cause the message.

First, there could be some USB device connected that Windows XP thinks is incompatible with USB2 Hi-Speed operation. The USB2 specifications define three speeds: Low Speed (1.5Mbit/s), Full Speed (12Mbit/s) and Hi-Speed (480Mbit/s). The first two of

these speeds are the same as the USB1.1 specification; only the Hi-Speed mode is new.

For this reason it was possible, in the early days of USB2, to find devices that described themselves as 'USB 2.0 Full Speed Compatible' when in fact they couldn't run any faster than USB1.1 devices. USB2 also laid down tighter specifications for USB cables. Not all USB cables are USB2 compatible.

Some PCs have BIOS setup options that relate to USB. Check for 'USB 2.0 Controller Enabled' and 'USB 2.0 Controller Mode Hi-Speed'. The BIOS on some Dell laptops has options for the Integrated USB Hub, labelled 'Compatible' (meaning USB1.1) and 'HiSpeed' (meaning USB2). 'Compatible' is the default, which is very odd since USB2 hubs are compatible with USB1.1 devices.

There is also a known issue when USB devices are left plugged in to your PC and then turned on after Windows has started. Windows may try to communicate with the device as it starts and gets an error, causing it to think the device is not USB2 compatible.

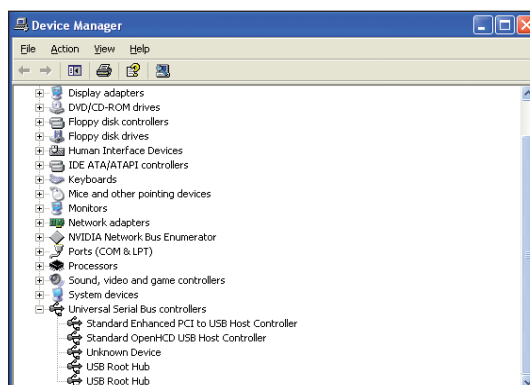
However, the most likely cause of the problem is that past errors have prompted Windows to downgrade the speed of your USB ports. The simplest solution, if it was working before, is to use System Restore to go back to a point when it was working. System Restore is under Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools.

If the TV device hasn't worked for a while, the best solution is to unplug all USB devices (except the mouse and keyboard) and uninstall all the USB

controllers and hubs from Device Manager. Restart the computer and Windows should detect your USB hardware correctly.

To check that it works, right-click on My Computer, choose Properties, click the Hardware tab and click on the Device Manager button. Click the plus sign to open the Universal Serial Bus Controllers section, and you should see several controllers listed. One of these should be called an Enhanced Host Controller. This one provides support for USB2 Hi-Speed mode.

Oddly, a separate Miniport driver provides each USB mode. With some chipsets (particularly Ali and VIA) you may have to update the motherboard drivers. With a VIA chipset you will also need an updated USB filter driver. After upgrading, Windows will reliably identify the USB2 Enhanced Controller. You should also make sure you have at least Service Pack 2 installed on a Windows XP computer.



▲ Cure USB2 trouble by uninstalling all the USB controllers and hubs in Device Manager and restarting your PC

Emails warn of new virus

Q I got the following warning from my sister this morning, and I was wondering what you know about it. I know any virus is bad news, but is it true you need to shut down your computer right away? It's only bad if you open it, right? Here's the message:

"This looks serious!!!

"I checked with Norton Anti-Virus, and they are gearing up for this virus! I checked snopes.com, and it is for real!! <http://www.snopes.com/computer/virus/postcard.asp>.

"Get this E-mail message sent around to your contacts ASAP. PLEASE FORWARD THIS WARNING AMONG FRIENDS, FAMILY AND CONTACTS! You should be alert during the next few days. Do not open any message with an attachment entitled 'Invitation' OR ONE CALLED 'POSTCARD,' regardless of who sent it to you. It is a virus which opens an Olympic Torch OR A POSTCARD IMAGE, which 'burns' the whole hard disc C of your computer.

"This virus will be received from someone who has your e-mail address in his/her contact list. This is the reason why you need

to send this e-mail to all your contacts. It is better to receive this message 25 times than to receive the virus and open it. If you receive a mail called 'Invitation' even though sent to you by a friend, do not open it. Shut down your computer immediately.

"This is the worst virus announced by CNN. It has been classified by Microsoft as the most destructive virus ever. This virus was discovered by McAfee yesterday, and there is no repair yet for this kind of virus. This virus simply destroys the Zero Sector of the Hard Disc, where the vital information is kept.

"COPY THIS E-MAIL, AND SEND IT TO YOUR FRIENDS. REMEMBER: IF YOU SEND IT TO THEM, YOU WILL BENEFIT ALL OF US."

Pauline Rubben, via email

A I'm glad you asked, because far too many people get scared by this stuff and pass this scare-mail on to all their friends. This one has been around for years in one form or another but, for some reason, several people have sent it to me just recently.

Notice the typical scare tactics: "This is the worst virus announced by CNN. It has been classified by Microsoft as the most destructive

virus ever. This virus was discovered by McAfee yesterday, and there is no repair yet for this kind of virus". All of this is untrue.

I recommend that people always use Google to check the status of a virus warning email before forwarding it. Sites such as www.snopes.com or <http://urbanlegends.about.com> will usually state whether or not an email is a hoax.

This one is a fake. Originally it was a hoax, but a few years ago someone released a virus that had some of these characteristics, hence the claims that Snopes says it is true. However, there have been no recent reports of it. McAfee didn't discover it "yesterday" (that phrase has been in different versions of the email for years) and it does not destroy sector 0 of the hard disk. Even if it did, it would be easy for an expert to fix.

However, there is a real Postcard virus. After fake rumours of such a virus, a virus-writer realised that a postcard from a friend was a perfect ruse to persuade people to open an attachment (infecting their PC). Infected PCs could then spread the virus. The intention behind the Postcard virus is to spread, though, and not to destroy users' data. Destructive viruses rarely spread far as they are soon spotted, and they eliminate themselves when they destroy data.

Feedback: CMOS battery is not rechargeable

In your reply to Terry Smart in issue 243 of *Computer Shopper*, you stated that the CMOS battery on the motherboard is rechargeable. In most cases the battery used is a CR 2032, as shown in your accompanying photograph. This is not a rechargeable type.

The CR series comprises 3V lithium-ion batteries intended for low consumption over long periods, which must be replaced when exhausted. It is true that there is battery drain only when the PC is powered down. When in operation, the power supply provides the current for the CMOS chip. In normal use the battery can last up to five years.

Paul A. Kennedy,
pkms@pakennedy.demon.co.uk



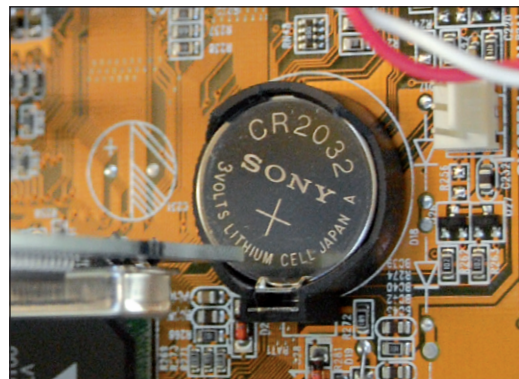
Thanks for your comment. I agree that these cells are not designed as rechargeable batteries, in that they are not intended to be deep-cycled from fully

charged to totally discharged repeatedly. However, in practice these batteries do receive a trickle charge when the computer is powered on, which extends their life considerably.

This is why CR2032 CMOS batteries have a typical life of five years of normal use, even if the computer is used only occasionally during the week, but will discharge completely in just a few weeks if the computer is kept in storage. This also explains why motherboards are shipped from China (a journey that typically takes about six weeks) with the CMOS jumper in the disconnected position, to stop them discharging. Most resellers move the jumper back to normal before shipping motherboards to customers.

On most ATX-style motherboards, the 5V standby signal, which the power supply provides all the time while it is plugged in to the mains,

provides power to the CMOS chip even when the computer is switched off. People who unplug their computer, or turn off the power at a power strip when it is not in use, will shorten the life of their CMOS battery.



▲ Lithium-ion CMOS cells are not true rechargeables, but power from the PSU extends their life considerably

How can I stop this virus and spam?



I am a silver surfer, 71 years old, with a limited knowledge of computing. I am using Avast Antivirus, and I know it's doing its job because approximately twice a week it throws up the following warning (always the same one): "A virus was found malware name WIN32:LEGACY."

Avast tells me to put it in its secure chest, which I do, but how can I permanently get rid of it (or should I live with it)?

Secondly, I keep getting the same spam, which Google Mail puts straight into the spam folder. Can I stop this reaching my spam box? The spam is asking if I want a larger p***s in various forms. If I knew who was sending them I could tell them I prefer hot dinners now.

Brian Smith, via email



Avast is not one of our recommended anti-virus programs because the last time we tested it, its performance was poor relative to other free software such as AVG. While there is a Win32/Legacy virus, it dates back to 1999 and has not been seen in the wild for many years, so it is very unlikely that your PC is infected with it.

Is Avast warning you about a virus in an incoming email or one that it found while scanning your hard disk? New warnings should only be about incoming virus-infected emails, and most email providers, including Google, scan messages for viruses before you receive them. If the anti-virus program keeps finding the same virus on your hard disk over and over again, it is certainly not doing its job.

I suggest removing Avast and replacing it with AVG. Then see what that finds. All anti-virus programs have a quarantine folder, also called a virus vault, secure chest or some other term. They place suspect files in this protected location where they can't do any harm.

If an infected file is one created simply for use by a virus and is not otherwise needed, you can simply delete it. When a virus infects a genuine Windows file, however, you want to be able to clean it of the infection and return the file to its original form. In this case, choose the 'Clean' or 'Disinfect' option if available.

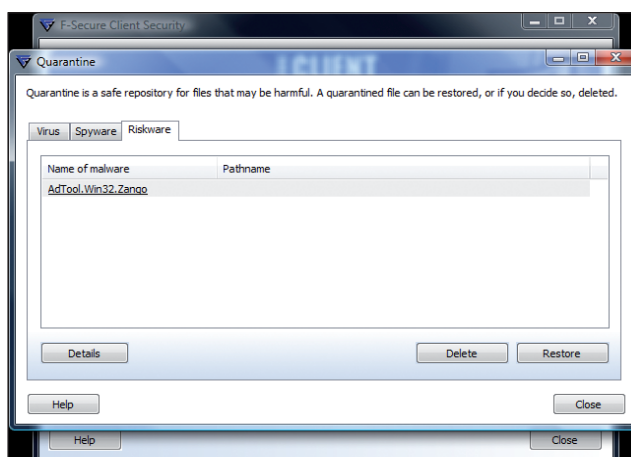
Sometimes cleaning a file is not possible. Early signatures that tell the software how to detect a new virus may not include information on how to clean the file. For this reason, anti-virus programs may suggest that you place an infected file in quarantine in the hope that a later update will enable them to clean it. The quarantine folder is also useful if the anti-virus program mistakenly claims that a genuine file is infected. After updating signatures to remove the false alarm, you can restore the file.

Never attempt to reply to spam, even to tell the sender not to send you any more. In most cases it won't work anyway, as the return address is usually made up or, worse still, it belongs to someone who has nothing to do with the spam.

If the return address is genuine, replying will simply tell the sender that your email still exists. He may honour your request and not send you any spam, but he may also sell your email address as 'confirmed' to a dozen other spammers. Replying to spam guarantees that you will get a lot more of it.

About the only way to get taken off a spammer's mailing list is to start reporting every spam you receive to services such as Spamcop (www.spamcop.net). If spammers find that sending spam to your email address always generates complaints that cause their email accounts and websites to be closed, they may add you to a list of known anti-spam campaigners, whom they try to avoid. This is a lot of work, though.

My advice is to let Google Mail do its work, glance through the spam folder once in a while to make sure no genuine mail has got in there by mistake (it learns from its mistakes quickly) and don't worry about deleting spam, as it doesn't count against your mail quota. And with over 6GB of free storage, it doesn't matter anyway.



◀ Anti-virus programs can keep infected files in a quarantine area, where they can do no harm to your PC

How do I secure my wireless network?

Q Some time ago my son stayed with us and set up a wireless network so that we could all access the internet and share files. He has since left home (again) and I have been checking the setup of the Netgear DG834G ADSL router. All the settings have been left at their default which, in view of all the warnings today, really concerns me.

I have looked at the manual on the CD supplied by Netgear and it appears to be talking a different language, with various warnings about advanced use only, WEP encryption, shared key authentication and so on – none of which means anything to me. I am concerned that I could easily destroy access for the wireless computers. Mine is connected directly with an Ethernet cable.

Can you please explain in understandable language how to set up the encryption system, which I assume stops outsiders logging on to the network? I would like all four PCs on the home network to have free access to the internet and each other. Two are dual-boot systems, with Windows Me and XP Home, one has Windows Me only and the last has XP Home only.

Ken Dickinson

A Most routers are shipped with security turned off. This is to make them easier to configure, but they are not meant to be used that way.

When changing a router's settings, always use a computer connected by an Ethernet cable, not by wireless. Most routers are accessed by typing their IP address into a web browser, such as Internet Explorer or Firefox. First check the IP address by clicking Start, Run and type Cmd, then OK to open a command prompt. Then type the command: ipconfig.

This will show you your computer's IP address and the gateway IP address, which is the address of the router. This will usually be 192.168.0.1 or 192.168.1.1, although some manufacturers use different addresses. Assuming that the gateway address is 192.168.0.1, type this into the address bar of your browser. It will change to http://192.168.0.1. You should get a box asking for your username and password.

PASSWORDS

Netgear routers always come from the factory with a username of 'admin' and the password set to 'password'. Log in and you should see a status screen. The first job should be to change the router's admin password from its default. You should see a menu item called Set Password on the front screen. If not, you may have to access it from the Status screen. As you will access this password only rarely, I suggest that you make a note of it in the manual or, better still, stick it on a label under the router.

Next, access Wireless Settings. There are only a couple of items to worry about. First you should enter a meaningful SSID name for the router, as all Netgear routers have a default of 'Netgear'. Similarly, all Linksys routers are set to 'Linksys' and all D-Link routers are set to

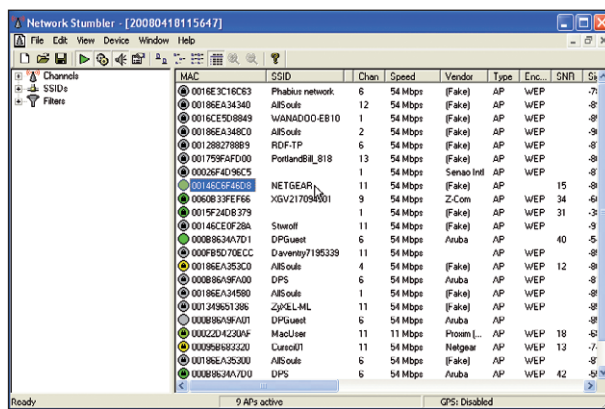
The case of the duplicate SSID Why you shouldn't use defaults

Renaming a router's SSID can help avoid problems. Recently I was called to a small office to investigate why one PC couldn't send email. After checking the obvious things, I noticed that it was connected by wireless, as there was no Ethernet port in the office. The office router was unsecured and set to the default 'Linksys' SSID.

I decided that, while I was there, I should fix this as they were sharing files over the network. Before fixing it I ran a program to detect wireless signals (Network Stumbler)

to decide which channel would give least interference. I found that there were two wireless routers with the Linksys SSID and, in this corner of the office, the strongest signal was from the other one.

It turned out that the office next door also had a router that used the default settings and had no security. The computer had connected to the wrong router and, since next door's router was connected to a different ISP, the computer couldn't send email through its own ISP's mail server.



◀ Programs such as Network Stumbler can detect any wireless networks within range

'dlink'. If you don't change it, the chances are high that one of your neighbours will have a router called Netgear too and then your wireless computers will not know which one they should connect to.

WIRELESS SECURITY

Having chosen a unique name for your router, you should set up wireless security. There are three common options available: WEP, WPA-PSK and MAC access lists. I don't recommend MAC access lists, except as a second layer of security in highly secure environments.

The MAC address is nothing to do with Apple computers but is an internal serial number unique to each network card. MAC access lists do not use passwords but instead ask you to create a list of the MAC addresses of the wireless adaptors in each computer you want to allow. If you use a plug-in wireless device, it probably has its MAC address printed on it.

MAC access list problems are extremely hard to troubleshoot because the computer won't connect to the router and you are given no clue why. What's more, unless you use access lists together with another form of encryption, a hacker can see the MAC address as it is sent over the wireless network, and many wireless cards allow you to change their MAC address, so a hacker can still break in easily.

If all your PCs support WPA-PSK, this is the simplest and most secure option. However, some early implementations of WPA-PSK were flaky, and Apple computers still seem to have trouble with it. For wider compatibility (but less security), you may be forced to use WEP instead.

With WPA-PSK you simply enter a passphrase (which can include spaces) of

between eight and 63 characters. Once connected, each computer will usually remember this phrase in future, but it is still a good idea to choose a phrase that you will remember easily.

If you choose the older WEP protocol, be aware that hackers have discovered how to detect the key by listening to network traffic. WEP keys have to be entered as hexadecimal characters: 26 characters for 128-bit WEP and 10 characters for 64-bit WEP. Don't be put off by the term hexadecimal – it just means that all numbers and the letters A to F are valid.

PASSPHRASE GENERATION

While some routers, such as the Netgear discussed here, allow you to generate a key using a short password, each manufacturer uses a different key generation algorithm, so you can use the password to generate WEP keys only if all your computers have the same make of wireless card. It may be easier to use a more memorable key such as a telephone number repeated or a variant of an easily remembered string such as 01020304050607080910111213 or 01234567890ABCDEF01234567890.

That's basically all there is to it. Set a router password, set the SSID, choose your security method and set a passphrase (for WPA) or encryption key (for WEP). Then save the settings and the router will reboot, which may take a minute or two.

The first time you connect each wireless device, you will have to choose the router to connect to. The PC will automatically detect the encryption method and ask you for the passphrase or key. Once you have entered it correctly and connected for the first time, the computer should remember it.

LG DVD Multi-Drive not writing to DVD-RAM discs

Q Following a very positive review of the LG DVD Multi-Drive in *Shopper* some time ago, I purchased this drive. It works perfectly well with all the relevant media except DVD-RAM discs. I have been in contact with LG and followed its suggestions, including updating the firmware, but without any success.

Can you suggest where I'm going wrong? For instance, is it necessary to format DVD-RAM discs before use? If so, how? Can DVD-RAM discs be damaged by an unsuccessful write? I have used a whole box in trying various strategies and am not sure whether they are still usable. Is there a way to test LG's software for bugs?

Brian Mackintosh,
brian.mackintosh@ntlworld.com

A The most likely problem is that you have bought DVD-RAM discs that are either unformatted, or have been pre-formatted with the UDF file system, but your drive is not set up to write to DVD-RAM using this system.

Windows XP's default file format for DVD-RAM discs is FAT32. If you use XP, make sure you have Service Pack 2 installed as this fixes some bugs with formatting DVD-RAM discs.

To format a disc, insert it in the drive, right-click on the drive icon and you should see Format as one of the options. A Quick Format will be adequate in most cases. This takes about 45 minutes less than a full format. Some users have reported that before they could format DVD-RAM discs from Windows they had to use Nero's quick-erase feature.

Once formatted to FAT32, a DVD-RAM cartridge should be recognised and can be used just like a very large floppy disk. DVD-RAM discs can be written to over 100,000 times, so you are unlikely to have ruined the discs by attempting to write to them. However, it is possible that the newer types of DVD-RAM discs without cartridges could be damaged by mishandling. Originally all DVD-RAM discs were enclosed in protective cartridges. Your LG drive will handle only the newer types (3 and 5) without cartridges, and type 2 and 4 if you remove the disk from its cartridge.

If you want to use DVD-RAM discs formatted using the UDF file system (which is the same system used by other CD and DVD rewriteable media), you may have to install a special driver or use appropriate software. Both INCD (part of Nero) and DLA (part of the Sonic suite) can write to UDF-formatted DVD-RAM discs. In addition, Panasonic – which makes many standalone DVD players that accept DVD-RAM discs as long as they are written using the UDF format – has released a driver that allows you to drag and drop files to a DVD-RAM disc. This driver can be found at http://laptopvideo2go.com/drivers/dvdram/DVD-RAM_XP_5.0.1.8.exe.

According to some users, you'll have to turn off XP's built-in CD-writing capability for this drive to get the driver to work properly. To do this, right-click on the drive icon in My Computer and click Properties. Go to the Recording tab and you should see a check box labelled 'Enable CD Recording on this drive'. Try clearing that option.

Finally, Windows Vista comes with built-in support for UDF writing to DVD-RAM. As FAT32 has a 4GB file size limit, UDF is the only way to write a single huge file to a DVD-RAM disc.

I can't access my Google Mail

Q I recently decided to change my email from AOL to Google Mail. At first this was successful. I notified everyone on my address list and received acknowledgements at my new address.

A few days later I cleaned up my hard disk, deleting cookies, temporary files and so on. Then I defragmented the disk. Now I find a lot of things have gone wrong. I seem to have lost all my stored passwords, including that of my online bank account. Amazon no longer recognises me as a known customer. The carry-forward balances in my Quicken accounts also show nonsense figures.

I have tried a System Restore, but it didn't put things right. It has become impossible to sign in to my Google Mail account. The sign-in page simply refreshes. I have been through all the Google help procedures without success and I can see no direct way of talking to anyone at Google to explain the problem.

I can't access the few emails I have already received on Google Mail, but I'm reluctant to abandon the service completely because it means that I shall again have to tell everyone that I have a new email address.

I'm sure that I must have done something silly. I am 85 years old and find it difficult to cope with some of the new technology. Are you able to help?

Peter Michaels, petermichaels@aol.com

A A number of anti-spyware and computer cleanup programs give the impression that cookies are evil things that you should get rid of, but in most cases they are essential if your internet sites

are to run as expected. It is a cookie that tells Amazon you are a previous customer. Stored passwords can be a security risk if someone else gets access to your computer, but for many of us (particularly as we get older and our memories get less reliable) they are the only way to keep track of multiple passwords. So in getting rid of cookies, these computer cleanup programs often cause more problems than they solve.

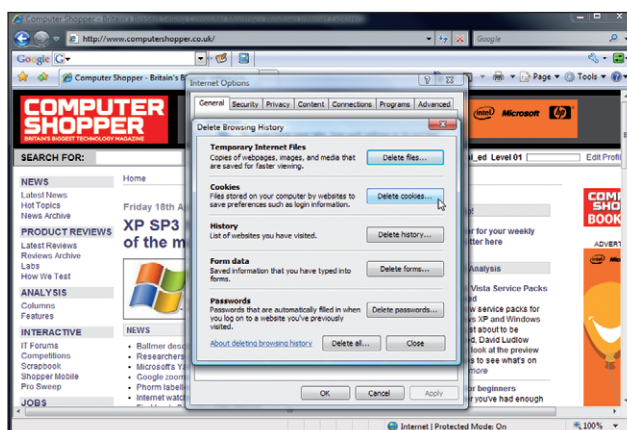
System Restore will change back any Registry values that have altered and restore any operating system files, but it doesn't back up and restore cookies or other user data files.

If you can't get on to Google Mail any more, you must be entering the username or password incorrectly. It will tell you in red what is wrong. Usually it says "Username and password do not match". Passwords are case-sensitive, so check that you don't have the Caps Lock key on.

Even if all your stored passwords have been deleted and you can't remember them, almost all sites have a method by which you can retrieve or reset a lost password.

Google doesn't provide phone support but it does have very good automated help systems. If you still can't log on, try clicking on the link labelled 'I cannot access my account', which is just below the sign-in box. If you forgot your password you can either answer the security question you selected when you signed up (typically your first phone number or your first teacher's name, although you can choose your own question) or else ask Google to send an email to your secondary email address.

I now make it a habit to send myself an email with every new site's username and password details. That way I only have to remember the password for my Google Mail account. **CS**



◀ Deleting cookies can play havoc with your favourite websites, especially if you usually log in automatically